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MEMO BOOK

Leskernick 1996
- personal diary

Please return

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June 3 96

I'm pleased to be here, but I'm currently bemused by exactly what is expected/desired/hoped for from me.

While I am happy with looking at the ~~process~~ process of digging & interpretation - in fact it's a good idea to be honest about this process, which is very unusual with excavations - I don't currently understand what WE are doing e.g. what are the aims/objectives/research design of Leskernick. There is a danger that many people will "waste" a lot of their time & emotional energy trying to sort out what they are doing.

One of the functions of this dig (I assume) is to be a training dig for undergrads etc. This has not yet been mentioned by anyone, & this worries me. I would hope that some of the people coming here are hoping to learn something about field/landscape archaeology. I was therefore shocked to discover that the luminous flags were put in place today since this will deprive all the students of the opportunity to see the landscape "in the raw" & to have the opportunity to derive the pleasures of identifying things for themselves — I'm really pleased that Mike & I spent 2 hours on the hill yesterday using our own eyes to identify/discover features for ourselves — this is one the major

pleasures of landscape archaeology for that vast majority of people who will not turn out to be professional archaeologists i.e. having the flags already out will destroy the possibility for pleasure & discovery that should be a vital part of the archaeological experience for these people. I can see no good reason whatsoever for doing this today rather than in 2 days time, once all the students have arrived & seen the hill.

The areas to be opened seem ambitious — will this result in some superficial & relatively crap information being retrieved over a large area rather than excellent/useful information being retrieved from a much smaller area?

I was somewhat bemused by the general reaction to the discussion after supper in Barbara Bender's caravan last night - Mike was merely making the obvious point that none of us know why prehistoric people did what they did, all guesses are just guesses unless they are tested against evidence, & most evidence can only be found by doing a good excavation. Sue was obviously upset (I don't currently understand why) & that upsets me. We (i.e. Mike, Chris & I) all like & respect Sue, & definitely would not wish to upset her. We will see how things develop...

4 June 96

I'm tired - but then I did walk to & from site twice today, in order to carry $3 \times 1.8 \text{ m} \times 5 \text{ cm} \times 5 \text{ cm}$ wooden posts + 10m of chicken wire - difficult, tiring, & wildly unnecessary since it would not have been required if ~~the~~ enough posts & fencing had been purchased before the 4-wheel drive ~~lift~~ to site on Sunday evening from the local farmer / commoner. Sue coped stunningly well with manipulating the same amount of kit given her size & recent pneumonia; but why oh why did we get into this situation??

I liked re doing the stone row grid on my own (necessary because animals had trampled it overnight), & laying out the excavation trench. And doing

the fence erection was necessary & useful even if not anything very much to do with archaeology. I'm looking forward to doing some archaeology (hopefully tomorrow).

Helen, Mike & I had volunteered to get to site early (to sort out preliminaries so there would be less delay when students arrive) while Chris & Sue went to buy the fence posts. I was looking forward to getting to understand the settlement survey view of the Project, & get some sort of guided tour of the settlement, when the others arrived. I was therefore shocked when I discovered that they had 1) been on site for 2 hours & 2) they had not come to the store row to "collect" us & involve us in the preliminaries. What chance is there for an integrated, interactive approach to the Project as a whole if we are marginalised, & ignored & cut out from even the first

discussions? [Helen, of course, was here last year so knows most of it, & it's possible that Mike wouldn't be interested anyway.] I feel rather bitter, & very pissed off about that.

I don't want to be seen as a "jobbing archaeologist" who just does ~~what~~ his job with no interest in, understanding of, or contribution to make to, the settlement survey & the Project as a whole.

6 June 7.05 am: I'm now angry about being marginalised by CT etc (as explained above & opposite).

6 June 9pm ish

One thing I didn't write this morning was that I was so pissed off I toyed with the idea of leaving the Project this weekend (refunding the appropriate level of subsistence, of course) and

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spending the rest of my leave from my employer in a B&B & visiting interesting sites around Cornwall.

Spent today redrawing the fence (for the third time; Fucking hell!!!); I really didn't want to do it, but if someone's got to do the crap jobs I suppose it ought to / has to be those of us who are paid to be here. After that I actually started doing some archaeology (at last) - drawing Hut 39. It's not quite archaeology that's useful, since it's the surface stuff - but it's good practice, & pleasant to do an "agreed to be needed" task of some perceived relevance to the overall project. Currently expect it to take ~ 8 person-days to complete the drawing - is this therefore a sensible way to spend our time?

One of today's highlights was the opportunity to watch the small / local herd of almost-wild horses on the moor - it occurred to me that my archery skills are good enough to have a 70% chance of shooting one; - palaeolithic lifestyles rule OK! It was good to see them playing / cavorting etc over the moor.

15 June

I've written nothing here for 9 days because I've been quite happy. Small thoughts & contributions have gone into the caravan & / or trench diaries - I'm just left with generalities; I'm sad to be leaving. I'd much rather stay & i) be useful by

doing some drawings & 2) learn more about digging.

I've learnt how much I still have to learn about digging. I'd dearly love to have the opportunity to improve/develop these skills, but it's unlikely I ever will since there are (I feel) economic imperatives upon me to, for example, continue paying the mortgage / have a "steady job" etc., all of which militate strongly against ever being (emotionally) able to be a circuit digger for a couple of years (which is the length of time I'd need to become a good digger). I'm stunningly impressed by Mike's practical skills & carefully thoughtout approach to all aspects of digging & recording & very impressed by Chris G's &

Sue's ability to rapidly take in, process & analyse evidence — especially when I find it difficult to even see the contexts they do, let alone catch up with their rapidity of thought about what it means / what it could mean / what the remaining problems are / how to resolve the remaining problems.

If I'm lucky I'll get 2-3 weeks on site per year for the next few years — woefully inadequate for the level of expertise / understanding I would like to develop / acquire, but there you go

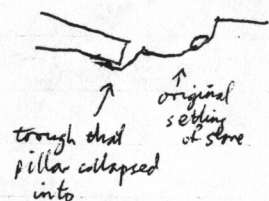
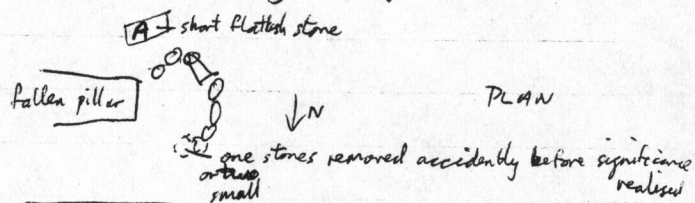
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On the day when the Prehistoric Society visited I was triggered by them to imagine the use of the 2-3m long rock that Chris Tilley calls a "bench", SW of House 39. Specifically, I envisioned 3 or 4 old people sitting on it in the late afternoon/evening in summer, with the women spinning with distaffs, & ~~some~~ of the children of the settlement playing on the ground around them. Gossiping about their relatives, complaining about the minor irritations in their lives, discussing who would be a good match for whom etc etc. Was it Mortimer Wheeler who said that, no matter how dry archaeology can often appear to be, what it's really doing (& its sole reason for existence) is digging up people, linking sentient human to sentient human across the millennia. Permanence & transience of the human experience. Gymnandias, love, death, joy, partings - these

come close to the essence of humanity. I'm interested in "the Old folks who lived on Laskernick hill" because we share much more than we don't - 20th century AD people will never be able to relive ~~the~~ life from the Bronze Age, but what our predecessors did here ~~has~~ made all of us who we are. We'll never be able to track down specific aspects & influences that lead from them to us, but those chains of causality did exist, & tie us to our historical, & prehistorical past.

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I didn't get an opportunity to write in LSR 96 site diary in the last couple of days (due to me being very tired):- I wanted to write about the packing stones;

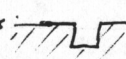


This trough may have been occupied by short flatish stone (perhaps)

A, ~~which formed~~ which formed the eastern part of the packing. When the terminal was decommissioned stone A was dug out, possibly trough deepened & extended, & then pillar fell/pushed over towards the east, resulting in 2 or 3 packing stones slumping or collapsing into stone hole. ~~that's why~~ All

of which seems to be a reasonable inference from the packing stones as found, & the cuts. But why use a long stone on one side?

- why are no packing stones on the north side?

My answer to this (which occurred to me when I got back to London) is delightfully functional, and relates to how the pillar stone was originally erected. Experimental archaeology (in chalkland) has shown that if you have a stone hole cut as  & then try to move a large stone into it from one side;

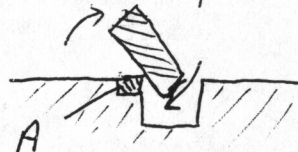
you often need to protect the edges of the hole



will be very damaged by weight of stone - true on Moorland, as well as chalk

Hence, my ~~current~~ suggestion is that the long packing stone (A) was put along the eastern edge of the original hole in order to distribute

the pressure as the pillar was erected;



since the soil structure may not have been ^{either} tough enough to resist the pressures _h on its own, or by using the smaller stones (such as found on the west side).

I don't have a better answer to the lack of packing stones on the north than that the stone hole was cut accurately & almost vertically along this side, & so didn't need them.

No doubt the anthropologists will dismiss this as being too functional. But have they ever actually tried to lift $\frac{1}{2}$ tonne or more of stone into position over the relatively sharp edge of a stone hole — we think not !!!

* * *

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Pippa worked a few days at the terminal, & wrote in the trench diary expressions like "another wonderful day" — she also verbally expressed pleasure at being there. She then seemed to spend $1\frac{1}{2}$ days doing a tentative, slow, & not exceptionally accurate surface plan. Next thing I heard were reports about her saying that she was getting "vibes" from the stones, & that she didn't like it there. I was startled, & shocked by this. While we all do get some emotional reaction to being on site (after all, if we didn't we wouldn't be archaeologists or anthropologists — & anyway any human always has some type of emotional state, which must be influenced by the surroundings (unless in a coma, or autistic))), the entire proposition that feelings/vibes emanate from the stones is a profound affront to human dignity, and our cultural predecessors.

It's as if the Age of Enlightenment had never happened. If we're going to accept such comments at all we may as well revert to collectively running around in the Wild Wood, scared of trees, rocks & spirits, ~~with~~ and give up all ideas of reason, rationality and causality — and, apart from leaving us all as nervous little furry creatures running at the slightest unexpected noise, sight or feeling, it would totally destroy the basis of academic study.

I was even more appalled when Barbara Bender visited the terminal trends the following day & asked the other person there if she was getting vibes from the stones — what on Earth is Barbara saying by means of such a question — that she

can entertain such anti-intellectual concepts? That she too ~~she~~ knows that you can get vibes from stones? Surely this can't be true — if it is she can't really believe in any of the precepts of intellectual honesty as painstakingly evolved over the millennia. In my more generous moments I might believe that she was just using a supposedly "accessible" manner of speech to initiate a discussion about the diggers' emotional reactions to the stones & the dig so far — BUT she didn't continue with the conversation once started and she didn't ask me (the only other person there) — if she had ~~she~~ would have had an opportunity to discuss the points mentioned above. P.S. Did she not

ask me because she wasn't interested in my answer, or because she believed that she already knew what I would say? Either way my trust in anthropological field work methods has continued to drop.

* * *

On my last afternoon on site (House 39) two sets of random visitors came over the hill - I did my standard 15 minute intro to the Project & possible interpretations, & possible problems - I enjoy doing that sort of thing. After the first lot left Kiera (who was the only other person there) said that she ~~didn't~~ knew ~~that~~ I knew all that stuff (i.e. about landscapes, the settlement survey et al.) in a tone of surprise & relative impressedness. So what did she think that I knew?

And anyway, what is her name? I've heard her called Kiera, Kieron and Kelly!

* * *

A worry about roof-lines; I think I've read somewhere that experimental Iron Age round house roofs tend to collapse if there's any break in the tie-ring due to the structural pressures that necessarily arise from having a roof on a round house. So what ~~were~~ the wall heights at Laskernick?



ooo ooo seems to be unlikely due to the problem mentioned above, so either the lower bits were built up with (now dismantled) stone wall, or with turf, to a uniform height, above which a horizontal tie-ring of timber could sit, in turn supporting the conical roof.

* * *

I don't think we should use the word
"Hut". These structures are too large
& impressive - they really are "Houses."

* * *

Methodologically I'm profoundly
worried by the assumption that
anthropological analogies are valid
between historically recorded primitive
societies, and European prehistoric
societies. As is well known, there
is no current environment anywhere in
the world that at all closely matches
the Mesolithic / Neolithic N. European
mixed forest. Hence any society
that developed therein (& Loskernick
developed from) may have been
fundamentally different to those
that anthropology has recorded in the
last 2 or 3 centuries. Indeed, it's

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possible that the reason Europe developed
its culture in the way that it did is
precisely because it didn't drift into
the "no progress" versions of culture that
Europeans encountered when they came
to explore the rest of the world. Hence
it may be precisely because ^{the} Loskernick
builders didn't in reality have menstrual
houses, birthing huts, or worry about
what stones were where in their houses,
that they are our cultural ancestors -
if they had had these things they too
would never have led to late 20th
liberal democracy, and so any patterns
that we think we see in the data may
just be exactly that i.e. patterns we
think we see, but that don't actually, &
never did exist.

* * *

Looking at the enclosure boundaries (which ~~consist of~~ include many large rocks), the fact that they are in alignments demonstrates that the vast majority of them must have been moved. If they haven't then there should be many more large rocks scattered within the enclosures. Some of these rocks are very large. If these have been moved then what evidence is there for claiming that more than 5 or 6 of the largest boulders in the whole settlement have not been moved? Answer = "None". I therefore see no evidence that grounders are common, and ~~that~~ the entire southern & western settlements may be entirely artificially constructs, with very few, or no unmoved stones.

Given the intensity of evidence for

medieval & modern quarrying of the hill - straddle stones, gateposts, millstones in various stages of production - and the historically recorded fame of the hill as a quarry supplying the whole of Cornwall, & into Devon, one wonders how much stone has been removed since the Bronze Age, and how much the remaining stones have been moved around. I note that one of the $\sim 60 \times 40 \times 15$ cm blocks in House 39 had been moved within the last couple of weeks (evidence = lush green grass underneath it). Just how disturbed is this site? Only a lot of carefully selected excavation will answer that.

The iron panning passing through the House 23 rubble context is promising, but we need more evidence.

* * *

The nominal "non-hierarchical" nature of the Project is a farce. Most students will defer to their academic/career enervators. (Just how honest & ^{accurate} ~~reliable~~ are all the diaries anyway [including this one]?) The whole Project would progress better if reality was admitted & the overwhelming influence of CT, BB & SH was admitted from Day One. It's excellent to be in a Project where everyone feels able to express opinions, put forward ideas etc, but decisions in this type of group can only sensibly be taken by people with enough background knowledge & experience to weigh the different factors. Hence the farce over the recording/methodology of the settlement survey which seems to have resulted in 80% of the first 10 days work being wasted —

because it was inconsistent & not repeatable. Once again, I suspect that confusion between Project aims has ruled i.e. are we investigating the Bronze Age, archaeological methodologies, or how to train initiates? These separate, & incompatible, aims need to be sorted out so that it is very clear which of the 3 is appropriate for each person, doing each sub-task, on each day throughout the fieldwork. This would help to reduce the sense of frustration that has sometimes surfaced from the settlement survey team.

* * *

It was a shame I missed the barbeque a few days ago, but not planning to start it till 10pm is just far too late in

the day for me; I'd already fallen asleep for $\frac{1}{2}$ hr at about 8.30 pm and I'm hopeless at getting up if I don't get enough sleep - perhaps there's a difference here between those who regard these weeks in Cornwall as a holiday, and those of us who believe we're here to do some serious work. While that's overstating ~~defining~~ the binary choice nature of our time here it is a useful dimension to place people on; Chris G and Mike are entirely at the work end, while I'm a shade closer to the holiday view. Gary seems to be able to combine the 2 - perhaps I'm just too old for all those student japes...

* * *

Sue expressed the hope that my time

here had changed my life.

It has. It would take 2 hours to explain how & why, & involve not just tedium on the part of anyone on the receiving end of it, but ~~it~~ would also require me to be thoroughly open, and that I am not prepared to do!

* * *

I haven't got the faintest clue if any of the above is what was wanted from the diaries. But it's been interesting to write them. A full

diary would take 2 hours a day to write, hence the selectivity of all my entries - I'm (overall) ^{on evidence} much more interested in digging & improving my excavation skills, than I am in writing up what I've done & why - but perhaps that just emphasises

the fact that I'm a field archaeologist,
by inclination, temperament, training and
choice.